(c) whether Government had asked the Commission on Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) for lowering of fertilizer prices, to the level prevailing at the beginning of this year and for relief on the interest payments on farmers' loans;

(d) if so, the details of recommendations made by CACP; and

(e) the decision taken thereon?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI AJIT SINGH): (a) to (e) In view of the failure of monsoons during June-July, 2002, the Government asked the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) to recommend measures to help the farmers and mitigate their hardship. While other proposals submitted by the CACP are under consideration, the Government has already announced payment of Special Drought Relief Prices ranging from Rs. 5 to Rs. 20 per quintal for different Kharif crops of 2002-03 season.

Private Participation in Agriculture Sector

*179. SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO:
SHRI RAMA MUNI REDDY SIRIGIREDDY:

Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that private participation in agricultural extension is vital for development of agriculture in the country;

(b) whether any study has been carried out by the Ministry with regard to providing extension services and the willingness to pay for the services; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI AJIT SINGH): (a) Yes, Sir. The private participation in agricultural extension is important as it will help complement and supplement the public extension system which has weakened in several States as a result of financial constraints being experienced by them.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) Details are annexed as Statement.

Statement

Details of the Study on Private Participation in Agriculture Sector

The acceptability of a network of Agri-Clinics and Agri-Business Centres was assessed by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) through a quick survey entrusted to Agricultural Universities located in Pantnagar (Uttaranchal), Pusa (Bihar) and Akola (Maharashtra) and National Academy of Agricultural Research Management, Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh). The survey covered both, farmers, who would be the clients, and agricultural graduates,

who would be the service providers. The survey indicates that farming community would welcome such a network and would be willing to pay for certain selected services to be rendered by these Clinics/Centres, such as services relating to soil and water quality testing, livestock health cover, custom hiring of machinery and implements, seed processing and extension consultancy services. The response was more positive from progressive farmers and those with large/medium holdings. The survey of agriculture graduates also indicated that the scheme would be, by and large, welcome provided, it had a provision for training in entrepreneurial and business management skills.

The Department of Agriculture and Cooperation after wide consultation with various stakeholders has brought out a "Policy framework for Agricultural Extension (2001)" in conformity with the National Agriculture Policy. The provisions including private participation and payment for services are being pilot tested under Innovations in Technology Dissemination (ITD) component of World Bank funded National Agricultural Technology Project (NATP). It covers Seven States namely Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Orissa and Punjab with four districts in each. Agricultural Technology Management Agencies (ATMAs), as an autonomous organization, have been established at the district level representing various stakeholders with an objective of working out new institutional arrangements to facilitate extension reforms. These efforts are proposed to be operationalized/up-scaled during Xth Plan through a new Centrally Sponsored Scheme—Support to State Extension Programmes for Extension Reforms.

Pollution and noise levels in metros

*180. SHRI RAJU PARMAR: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the pollution and noise levels in the metro cities have increased during the last three months;

(b) if so, what are the reasons therefor; and

(c) what steps Government have taken or propose to take to minimise the pollution and noise levels in the metro cities?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T. R. BAALU): (a) and (b) According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), in the last three months, the pollution and noise levels increased during festive periods. This is due to bursting of fire crackers, use of loud speakers and higher vehicular movement.